

WHO WILL LOOK AFTER THE KIDS?

THE PRACTICALITIES FACED BY A GROUP OF MOTHERS PARTICIPATING IN PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION IN NEW ZEALAND

ABSTRACT

The participation of mature-aged students in tertiary education is increasing and is particularly evident in primary school teacher training in New Zealand.

A group of mothers with dependent children, enrolled in pre-service teacher education at the Christchurch College of Education, (hereafter named “the College”) took part in this qualitative study to share the practical implications they perceived as impacting on them and their families. Their participation in such lifelong learning identified issues such as dealing with their children’s feelings, childcare considerations, clarifying the importance of their support networks, coping with their increasing financial constraints and having a significant lack of time. They also made suggestions on how the College could better meet their specific needs, in the hope that it would make their lives easier and encourage the widening participation of other mothers to become primary school teachers.

INTRODUCTION

The profile of students entering pre-service teacher education in New Zealand has changed over the last ten years. An increasing number of students are of mature age (defined as 21 years of age plus in this study) and women, and they bring to their study a wide range of life experiences and a commitment to their intended role as new teachers embarking on their careers. Many of them, however, also have other responsibilities, such as caring for their children (some are solo parents), paying off mortgages, engaging in

part-time employment and various other commitments, all of which can make their participation in lifelong learning difficult.

In recent times New Zealand, like other countries, has experienced a gender transition in higher educational enrolment and attainment, with women participating in higher education at a significantly higher rate than men. In New Zealand in 2000, there were just over 41,000 more women enrolled than men, but this had increased to over 75,000 in 2004, making the total of women enrolled in tertiary education in New Zealand 294,439 (Callister et al., 2006). In Britain, there has been an enormous expansion over the last decade, opening up higher education to groups, including women of mature age, who may not have previously considered doing a degree (Reay et al., 2001).

This increasing diversity is requiring tertiary education institutions to gain a greater understanding of the challenges that many of their students face when electing to participate in lifelong learning. Given that the majority of students undertaking teacher education in New Zealand are women and that many of them are also mothers, it justifies the importance of researching this group to investigate what their perceived needs are. It can also be suggested that the findings from this study may have implications in a more global sense. Furthermore, it may seem fair to suggest that providers should implement defined support networks and strategies to meet their specific needs (see Carney and McNeish, 2005, in this regard).

So, what are these needs? What do the student-teachers who are also mothers actually think they need? This study sought to answer these questions. The aim was to identify not only the practicalities of being both a student-teacher and a mother, but also to provide insight and informed knowledge about how participating in pre-service teacher education affects these students' lives. The hope was that the information obtained would help the College and other teacher education providers provide these students with the necessary support, and also provide information for other female students with dependent children already enrolled in higher education institutions or considering enrolling in them.

CONSIDERATIONS FROM THE LITERATURE

Mature students who see themselves as having a 'second chance' at learning are not unusual in a global sense (see, for example, George and Maguire, 2002; Mills, 1999; Reay, 2002), and the issues and experiences they face are probably commonly shared and understood ones. However, extant literature shows that students who are mothers generally have to overcome particular barriers to successfully pursue and reach their educational goals.

A survey conducted by the New Zealand University Students' Association (NZUSA) in 2003, entitled *NZUSA Student Parent Survey: A survey of the needs of students who care for children*, collected data from a sample of the College student body, of which 84 percent were women. The key issues for those students who were parents were identified as finding the time to juggle the two roles of parent and student successfully, balancing the workload of their studies with family life and responsibilities, clashing of college times with parenting times (evenings, placement times, etc.), children becoming ill and needing their parent with them, childcare issues and financial issues (Lidgard, 2004).

Work in the United Kingdom by Arskey et al. (1994) also shows that mature students find balancing work, study and family life particularly problematic. Dewart (1996) provides a more specific insight. Common issues and anxieties for the mothers in this study included lack of time, difficulty meeting family demands, fear of failure, stress and anxiety, the need to set priorities and integrating family issues with study issues. Whisker (1996) and Merrill (1999) discuss the emotional costs for mature women whose partners feel threatened by their participation. Merrill (1999) also notes that a lack of integration between home and university life often requires students to engage in complex coping strategies. As Neale (2001) found, pressures of work and family life often force students to assign lower priority to their study. According to Australian literature, Kantanis (2002) found that mature students tend to have a heightened awareness of time and try to make every minute count. Kantanis (2002) goes on to note that these students are often

adversely affected by increased financial pressures and very reliant on positive support from their partner and/or family.

Edwards (1993) discovered that students who are also mothers had various ways of both separating and connecting these dual roles. In most cases, these women simply added studying to their traditional domestic roles, which required them to find new or additional ways of managing their domestic responsibilities and childcare arrangements. Thompson (2000) reported that mothers feel constrained by looking after their family while also attending university, while Neale (2001) identified having to deal with family issues and problems at home as the main barriers preventing or limiting mothers' ability to achieve their higher education aims.

To understand the sacrifices and determination these women show in participating in this particular form of lifelong learning, it is important to look at the significant practical issues they face. Childcare is perhaps the main and most ongoing problem faced by mothers who are students (Griffiths, 2002; Lidgard, 2004), with the emotional impact of dealing with the attitudes and behaviours of their children as their mothers take more time away from home not far behind (Griffiths, 2002). Having people who positively supported them in this respect, including extended family members, friends and partners, seems to be vital in how well mothers cope with these experiences (Bay, 1999; Kantanis, 2002; Griffiths, 2002). The financial pressures of paying for childcare in addition to everyday living costs and the costs associated with study (for example, course fees, books, travel, etc.) also burden mothers participating in higher education (Astin, 1993; Griffiths, 2002; Lidgard, 2004). Lack of time to spend with their children, their partners, their families and friends, and to complete assignments and study has been identified as another significant difficulty for mothers (Bay, 1999; Cantwell and Mulhearn, 1997; Edwards, 1993; Lidgard, 2004).

A NOTE ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The practical issues (as identified in the literature) faced by women who are mothers as they participate in their learning became the starting point for the research in this present study. Women make up a significant number of our pre-service teacher education student population. From reading the literature and from observations in this area, it can be suggested that such women are disadvantaged compared with male students and thus the issues would have specific meaning for women studying to become teachers.

The principles of feminist research thus influenced all parts of the research process for this study, from the choice of topic to the methods used for inviting participants to take part, collecting the data through interviews, comparing the data to the literature and analysing the findings. Such principles were the value placed on reciprocity, having a commitment to social change, the position of the researcher and the role of the participants in the research (Stanley-Clarke, 2000). As the researcher, it was important through this type of methodology, to capture the women's understandings, emotions and actions within their traditional role in the world.

METHOD

The interviews with the women followed the 'feminist sociology norm', being in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in an environment where the subjects felt safe and relaxed (Duncan and Edwards, 1999). The interviews were each about an hour long and asked the women to provide demographic detail, such as numbers and ages of children, and to describe the events that led to their decisions to become primary teachers, the effects on their children, their wider family and their financial status, and how being a student had affected their personal relationships with partners and friends. They were also asked what they thought the College could do to make it easier for them and their families while they were studying there. With these questions, prompts and pursues, their beliefs, attitudes and motivations were sought.

The interviews were audio-taped and then transcribed in order to conduct a detailed narrative analysis. A process of grounded interview analysis (Duncan, 2002), providing a means of analysing the interview material from the in-depth semi-structured interviews, so as to provide generalised and categorical information which remains grounded in the accounts of the respondents (Duncan, 2000)) was used to analyse the data. Limitations of the 'feminist sociology norm' in using semi-structured interviews are that it accesses information at the individual level (while some of the information sought refers as much to collectives as the individual), there is a potential for the respondent to reply in terms of a discourse she feels is expected and it is weak in terms of accessing general patterns. A way to compensate for these weaknesses in future research could be the addition of a focus group (to access dominant discourse in terms of a group discussion around the issues) and interpretive biography (accessing individual belief systems and how these have emerged in relation to respondents' social contexts and experiences (Duncan, 2000)).

The small sample size of this study may be questioned in terms of whether the data gathered from six women can be validly used to represent an understanding of the experience of other mothers who are also student-teachers. As with Duncan and Edwards' lone mothers project (1999), this small group design can be justified by reference to Sayer's (1992) realistic account of explanation in social science, where intensive work of this type is superior in accessing social process and in establishing social cause. The complexity within the demographic of the small group was thought to be interesting due to their various domestic arrangements, their ages and the number and ages of their children (three sole parents, two married, one living with her partner, three aged 40 and over, three in their twenties) and their individual circumstances, brought a wonderful richness and uniqueness to the data. A study by Maguire (2001) of seven older women who teach teachers draws on refreshing ideas and references to validate the insights that such research can give, and suggests that small numbers can still be likely to reflect the worlds of the people represented by the research participants.

ETHICAL ISSUES

As a woman researcher known to the students as a lecturer and a mother of two dependent children, my position was open and transparent. The commonalities shared with these women by virtue of our gender seemed to enable the participants to willingly and eagerly share their stories. Throughout the research process, an endeavour was made to acknowledge and protect the rights, interests and sensitivities of the participants at all times. When analysing the data, only the pseudonyms of the participants were used, and drafts of information were destroyed three months after completing the research. This project gained approval from the ethics committee of the institution.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the interview data highlighted the following as the main practicalities the women had to contend with when endeavouring to combine study and mothering:

1. Dealing with how their children felt about their mother becoming a student and, therefore, spending more time away from them and the home.
2. The added responsibility of organising childcare.
3. Reliance on support networks and what to do if this support was not always positive.
4. The financial strain on the family.
5. A lack of time to do the things they used to do and for studying.

These concerns are presented in the order of importance each seemed to assume in the interview data through tallying the number of times the concerns were mentioned.

COPING WITH CHILDREN'S FEELINGS

The students identified that their commitment to study had positive and negative influences on their children, and they also provided insight into how the children themselves felt about their mothers taking up study. These influences and the children's attitudes certainly had practical implications for the women as students and mothers, especially in terms of their abilities to meet the obligations of both roles. However, the emotional aspect of feeling guilty by trying to do this successfully was also very

significant for all of these mothers. In fact, guilt seemed to be a feeling that underpinned everything they were trying to do.

The positive aspect reported by the mothers centred mainly with their children, particularly the school-age children, seemingly being happy with their parent's decision to 'become a teacher', perhaps because learning was something to which the children could easily relate.

He thinks it's really cool. He wants to come into my classroom when I am on teaching practice so he can see where I am and find things that are the same in his classroom. (Rachel, aged 40, mother of Sam, aged six.)

She's learning what I am hopefully going to be teaching some day, which is boosting her self confidence. It's really great. (Alice, aged 22, mother of Jessica, aged three.)

Of the negative aspects, the one that seemed to generate the most anguish and thought among all of the participants was that their children generally wanted to spend more time with their mothers when they were at home, and this was especially true of those children whose mothers had always been at home in the past.

He equates me not being at home with not loving him. (Rachel, aged 40, mother of Tony, aged fourteen.)

Now when they need help with things, I can't always help because I am studying or trying to get assignments done. (Hayley, aged 42, mother of Tania, aged sixteen, Shannon, aged fourteen and Kirsty, aged nine.)

The mothers with younger children reported that their children appeared to be clingier and needier than they had been prior to their mother taking up study. For one mother, for example, 'Mummy, I want you' meant a greater demand for her time when she was at home coupled with behaviours like wanting to sleep in the mother's bed and clinging to

her when being dropped off at pre-school. The mother said she felt these behaviours were indicative of her child having difficulty adjusting to her mother not being as available as she was previously.

The negative reactions from the children to their mothers' wish to study, as perceived by their mothers, thus appeared to relate to the mother moving out of her traditional role at home and into something unexpected and alien to the children's previous understanding of their mothers' role. Added to this was, for the children of solo parents especially, the experience of being put into pre-school, or some other form of care, and of being looked after by someone else. The older children were obviously not used to their mothers being away from the home so much. Nor were they used to them being preoccupied with studying and assignments when they were at home. Those children in two-parent homes also had to adapt to changes in the family dynamics, with fathers taking on some of the previously 'mother-dominated' roles. For the mothers, the predominant feeling regarding all these scenarios seemed to be guilt.

CHILDCARE

For the six women, the lack of available affordable childcare has meant their having to juggle the needs of their children for childcare around their responsibilities as a student. This feeling of carrying a double burden tends to create considerable feelings of guilt and anxiety for mothers (Stanley-Clarke, 2000). Historically women have traditionally accepted the responsibility of caring for their children, therefore it is women who assume the role of locating and paying for this care if they choose to take up paid employment and/or study.

The six students indicated that organising and maintaining childcare was a particular headache for them while they were studying at college. This was particularly problematic for the mothers with children of school age, in particular when these women were on professional practice and expected to be at their schools before their own children were at theirs and to remain there after the children had gone home.

Five of the six women stated that their parents and family members provided much needed support in the form of looking after their children at various stages of their training. They sometimes cared for the pre-school children while the students were working part time or studying at the library in the evenings or at weekends. 'I try not to ask them [Alice's parents] too much, but I work all day Saturday so they have her for the whole day.'

Having family members or friends assist with dropping off and picking up school-age children while the students were in classes or on professional practice was also deemed very necessary in terms of allowing the women to manage their study successfully. However, this, at times, seemed to add to the students' feelings of guilt associated with not doing this themselves and having to rely on others. 'Mum would pick him up from school and take him home to her house until I was finished and could come and get him' (Rachel, aged 40, three children).

Unwell children were another considerable concern for the women, and all said they had trouble knowing what to do at these times in relation to childcare. Two of the women said they had brought sick children to college classes with them, with the pre-arrangement and support of the lecturers concerned. However, all six women said they felt they needed to stay at home with sick children when they could, even if it meant getting behind in their work or missing classes. 'It puts you way behind on college work. I can't afford to take the time off unless it is absolutely necessary' (Hayley, aged 42, three children).

They also all said they felt even guiltier if they came to college and sent unwell children off to school or tried to arrange other people to look after them. They felt it always fell upon them rather than their partners (for those women who had them) to find arrangements for childcare.

SUPPORT NETWORKS

All of the women acknowledged how important positive support systems were in assisting them successfully with engaging in their studies. Friends who were supportive

seemed to understand that the women no longer had the same amount of time as previously to maintain their friendships.

One of my close friends has been a real brick — she assists me when I am struggling with an assignment or need someone to pick up the kids at the last minute. She was here at college last year so she really understands the pressure times. (Pam, aged 28, two children.)

I don't get to catch up with my friends much anymore, but they are still really supportive and understanding. (Alice, aged 22, one child.)

Of the three students in the study who had partners, two indicated that their partners had been supportive of them while they were studying. This support centred on practical help, such as getting out of bed after night shift to take children to school while the student completed an assignment, and doing more of the housework and daily chores. It also involved the less tangible support of 'putting up with the increased workload and time commitment', as one woman expressed it.

When I've got assignments on or pressure, he kind of gets in there and does the ironing and makes the school lunches. He realises that I do quite a lot that doesn't always look as though it's been done. (Justine, aged 49, four children.)

However, two of the women with partners had also experienced personal difficulties with their partners while enrolled in the course. This included even less time together and an added strain on the marriage relationship.

It can be very difficult because he is used to me being home running around after him, and now I am not doing that! I've put myself first. We've even been to counselling and were very close to splitting up, but he has made an effort to save our marriage. He has had to do a lot of changing — it was an unexpected strain. (Rachel, aged 40, three children.)

This student's honest reflection of the unexpected outcome of her wanting to have a career illustrates the, sometimes, very personal and inward dilemmas and sacrifices that women often have to deal with when they choose to change the status quo at home.

MONEY

The themes of financial pressure and economic dependence also emerged as key issues for the women. Although their financial circumstances varied, all six stated that money had become a considerable practical concern from the time they entered college.

The three solo parent mothers were receiving the Domestic Purposes Benefit (D.P.B.), a monetary allowance for single parent families, from the Government and therefore, were also able to get an extra lump sum to pay for course fees, several basic textbooks and childcare if needed. While they were able to allocate this assistance when needed, they maintained that the amount was insufficient to pay for all of the necessities required to study full time with dependent children.

The money coming in from the benefit can pay for costs and stuff, but there isn't enough for some of the really important textbooks that I need. (Kay, aged 28, one child.)

It's not bad with benefit money to pay for fees, but it's the travelling in and out of college from where I live in the country that is hard — the petrol costs are high. (Alice, aged 22, one child.)

We're just getting deeper and deeper into debt and have had to re-mortgage the house just to live. (Justine, aged 49, four children.)

Three of the students had acquired student loans and were using this money to pay fees, book costs, and some childcare costs, but they were very aware of the eventual need to pay the loans back. Five of the six women were also in part-time paid employment, in an

effort to ease the financial pressure on their families. 'I'm working part time to lighten the financial load (that's the only reason) [and] to take the stress off my partner' (Pam, aged 28, two children).

This added commitment made supporting the everyday needs of their families and of completing all their college work even more difficult. The women talked about finding the 'right balance' between part-time work, college and family life. They all said they worked only for the financial benefits and, for all but one, the jobs involved very basic levels of skills. 'I do tutoring as well, which I could give away quite easily, but the money is too good' (Rachel, aged 40, three children).

Juggling paid employment on top of their mothering and college responsibilities added to the complexity of organising the various facets of their own lives and those of their family members, and is a telling example of the traditional expectation of mothers trying to be all things to all people.

TIME

The final notable practicality for the six women related to time or, more specifically, the lack of it. Having to fit more things into their time was a common experience for all six women. In their traditional roles as mothers, they continued their responsibility for domestic chores, caring for the children and organising the household, but the addition of study and (in five cases) part-time employment required them to accommodate a whole new list of time-consuming activities. All found their constant grappling with their lack of time highly stressful.

There is no doubt that the practicalities of participating in this type of learning have had huge implications for these mothers and their families. The gendered nature of such practicalities has been indicated and shows how their strong motivations for becoming teachers manages to override the constant feelings of guilt, their lack of money and time, and the effects it can have on all of those around them.

IDEAS FOR SUPPORT

One of the main ideas to emerge from those suggested by the mothers on what the College could do to support them as they juggled the disparate demands on their time was that of the College setting up a more formalised college-based support system for students with children. They suggested that the provision of an informal session involving college staff for family members was recommended, especially as this type of set up would probably better suit children.

It would be great to get our families in to an informal session. We could bring the kids, and they could find out what we are doing and how full on it can be at times. I don't think they really understand. (Hayley, aged 42, three children).

Providing a designated 'space' for students with families to study or 'hang out in' (as one of the women put it) was put forward as a valuable means of support. The women emphasised that this should be a quieter space than that provided by the College's student common room and library, and that it might also have a child-friendly space attached so that students could bring their children after school or at weekends for a short time if they needed to get resources.

It's really hard to find time during the week to get to the computer labs, and I don't want to have to pay for a babysitter, or ask my parents for more childcare as it is - it would be so much easier if I could bring her with me and know that she could play while I work. (Alice, aged 22, one child).

The women, acknowledging that the difficulties would not end with their graduation from college, suggested that advice from in-service teachers on making the transition into teaching and then managing the dual demands of family and career once there would also be useful. 'Teachers who have got children could come in and tell us how they do it – manage a career and their families successfully.' (Pam)

All six women focused on the difficulties associated with childcare when considering college-based support. They considered the College could be more proactive in this area, by either giving students at the College priority over staff and outside parties in terms of getting their children into the College pre-school, or investigating building a larger facility. Even though the College has its own childcare centre, the three women with pre-school children talked of the difficulty of getting their children into the centre, as it was always full and had a long waiting list. They all said how much easier they thought it would be to have their children cared for in a college-based facility.

It would have been ideal to have her close by to me. I would have loved that. (Kay, aged 28, one child.)

Having your children on campus with you is a lot better than having to commute — you know, leave and rush.... It would be nice to go and see them at lunchtime as well. (Alice, aged 22, one child.)

In a related vein, the three participants with school-age children thought that the College could offer an after-school care programme, which would relieve the women of a lot of the stresses associated with organising other people to pick their children up and the constant rushing to get there themselves. They felt that if their children could get to the campus via taxi or some other means, it would resolve many of the practical issues associated with arranging after-school care or trying to be there themselves for the children after school, despite having classes to attend.

Having after-school care would relieve a lot of the stress that comes with relying on other people and having to organise who it is that is picking them up on certain days. (Rachel, aged 40, three children.)

The tough thing is that if you have a lecture and it goes over the time, and there is a discussion after that you would like to hear, you can't hang around — it just isn't an option. (Hayley, aged 42, three children.)

Two of the women also raised the importance of having lecturers who are understanding and supportive of their situation. These comments related to the women sometimes not being able to be in class because of a sick child at home, or not having an assignment done on time because of issues with children at home. Both said they found it difficult to explain these dilemmas to certain lecturers at times:

There're a couple of lecturers who just do not understand the whole child thing. They can be unsympathetic when you have a really sick child and can't come to class, or need to bring your child to class to be there because the caregiver has let you down. There are a few circumstances when you just can't help it. (Pam, aged 28, two children.)

It appears that the women had reasonably practical suggestions for the College on how they could better meet the needs of all students with children, but the ones they were particularly strong on could be argued as being those specifically from a mothers perspective, as they juggled their traditional roles as mothers with their new roles and responsibilities as students. Aligning with the literature (Lidgard, 2004; Griffiths, 2002; Bay, 1999), the students wanted specific support for themselves and their children, and practical solutions that might show the College's commitment to addressing their needs.

IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study found that the key issues affecting six mothers with dependent children who were studying to become primary school teachers related to the practicalities of managing their dual roles as student and mother. These included dealing with their children's feelings (whether positive or negative), childcare, support networks, money and time. The women also offered some suggestions as to how the College might support them as they juggled their varied responsibilities. These included inviting the students' children and families along and thus including them in the student part of their lives, providing a child friendly space for parents to bring their children when they needed to be at college

after hours, offering such students priority to the college childcare centre and some after-school care, providing access to beginning and experienced teachers with their expertise to come and speak to the students about managing their families while teaching full time, and a reminder to staff that students with children may need some leniency when it comes to caring for sick children. While the findings of this small group cannot necessarily be transferred to the population as a whole, they do align with what is already known in the literature. The findings are also important in that they highlight the experience of women studying for a profession that is having trouble attracting not only sufficient numbers of practitioners, but also practitioners with the maturity and breadth of life experience often touted in the literature as contributing to good teaching

For the six women in the study, the wellbeing of their children appeared to be at the forefront of their minds at every turn, and it was evident that decisions they had made regarding their study were set against the needs of their families. Even their decisions to take on even more responsibility by taking up part-time paid employment were made in terms of relieving financial stresses on their family brought about by the financial costs of undertaking study. One of the main lessons to be learnt from the stories, therefore, is that students with dependent children perceive that they achieve their degrees at personal cost to themselves and their families. Guilt and stress were pervasive emotions in the women's stories, and such emotions doubtless have a negative impact on students' ability to study effectively.

This research captured the experiences of the women at one point in their lives. Further research could be undertaken, as they leave college and become new beginning teachers, to investigate whether the issues affecting them and their children change and whether the issues they experienced as students become more or less intensive. Another area of focus for future research would be exploring what works (or is positive) for women with family and study commitments during their pre-service teacher education. Although some positive comments came through, the direction of the interviews and the women's responses related primarily to difficulties. A precedent for a more positive approach is seen in work by Bay (1999), who asked a group of mature age students what their

greatest satisfactions had been on their return to study. Almost all acknowledged new knowledge and skills, a renewed sense of self, pleasure in achieving good grades, the making of new friends and receiving praise from their families.

It might also have been useful to ask the participants in this study to keep a journal while on professional practice, as some of the issues the women identified, such as childcare, seemed heightened at this time. Having the women keep a reflective journal could have provided extra data that may have provided a form of triangulation when analysing the data, and also may have helped identify in what way problems experienced at this time differed from problems experienced when the women were involved in college classes on campus.

A comparison between the wider student population of on-campus students with dependent children and those studying by distance might also be another useful area of research. Here, the aim would be to investigate whether the issues experienced by women with dependent children studying on campus experience differ from or are the same as those with women studying at a distance.

In an era where attracting mature age people to train as teachers is deemed important, those involved in providing teacher education need to seriously consider the issues raised by the six women and what can be done to help lessen these problems. Students who are parents, especially those who are mothers, need to feel that their tertiary study is of value to them and their families, and that the environment they are learning and participating in supports them and their specific needs.

More money, more time, more flexibly available childcare, more sympathetic timetabling to reflect school and pre-school hours: the needs are neither unusual nor new. To move forward, those providing teacher education need to think of more innovative and creative ways of providing tangible and concrete support for students who are parents, support that truly reflects the changing demography of tertiary student populations which shows women with dependent children as a reasonably large and increasing proportion of the

student population in New Zealand in the 21st century. Students who are parents should be provided with equitable access to tertiary education to make their learning as successful as it can be, for the benefit of themselves, their children and their families, and, ultimately, for the benefit of society. It should be noted that this is not just a concern for mothers training to be teachers, but for all mothers in any tertiary or higher education institution or, in fact, any student who is caring for others such as a sick partner or elderly relative. These are situations that may be more challenging because of their hidden nature, but are still very real and significant issues.

This research presents a challenge to re-think how to best meet the needs of these students if we are to encourage a widening of participation in these courses, and how being a student, and thus engaging in a form of lifelong learning, impacts significantly on the lives of those who are mothers. Given that teaching as a profession needs to attract people willing to enter the profession, teacher education institutions should take notice of their voices and do their best to meet their needs. Certainly, the suggestions put forward by the women as to how the College might support them are modest and indicate acknowledgement of what institutions might reasonably do to help them.

One such provision for this growing area of need has come about with the merger of this College with a neighbouring larger university, scheduled for 2007. The service from an outside provider for after-school care for students with children has recently been advertised and the opportunity for students to have access to such child care facilities on both sites may assist with the need for more quality affordable childcare. The institutions' ability to act on providing continued support for these students requires a rethinking of policies and an examination of resourcing, part of which (as with the after-school care) may need to come from the agencies supporting these institutions.

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